

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

IRAP Ontario

The Planit Measuring Company Mississauga, Ontario

Mike Laurie is adding a 21st century twist to the carpenter's adage of measure twice, cut once. He's measuring again after the cut. And it's really paying off. His company, Planit Measuring creates highly accurate digital floor plans and space audits of existing buildings that help real estate agents sell homes and building owners discover they have more rentable space than they'd thought.

But recently, Mississauga, ON-based Planit's success became a problem: The workload outstripped their outdated tools. That's when Laurie turned to the National Research Council of Canada's Industrial Research Assistance Program (NRC-IRAP) for help in creating a unique, state-of-the-art measuring device.

"We started getting inquiries from right across North America to measure buildings. However, we were simply using paper sketch pads and a laser measuring tool to measure the distances and we knew this was inefficient," says Laurie, a professional engineer and Planit's president. "We'd make the sketches and then go back to a computer in the office and enter them into a CAD (Computer Assisted Design) program. But we realized we could knock-off a step if we entered the dimensions directly into the CAD program."



The Planit Measuring Company's President, Mike Laurie

For several years Laurie had been thinking about how to bundle the laser measuring system into a laptop-based CAD program. He'd even developed a bulky prototype that he says resembled an old cigarette vendor's tray. But it wasn't until he contacted NRC-IRAP that the idea gelled.

"IRAP Industrial Technology Advisor David Hawkes provided a tremendous amount of personal enthusiasm and guidance, and helped identify what we really needed to get accomplished to achieve our goal, and IRAP provided the money to do this," says Laurie.

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"It was only with this support that we actually sat down and focused on the project, and within three months we had a patent pending on our system," adds Laurie, noting that their literature and patent search was also done through NRC-IRAP.

The result of this focus is the MeasuringBoard, a proprietary, easy-to-use device to create on-site, real-time floor plans with laser accuracy. The MeasuringBoard's laser measurer is plugged directly into a tablet PC-based CAD program. The user quickly sketches the room onto the touch-pad screen, and the laser measuring fills in the details.

"Instead of spending 10 minutes or more on a room, we do it in a minute," says Laurie of the MeasuringBoard, which won the Toronto Construction Associations 2002 TIPTA award for the most innovative product or service of the year.

In the less than a year since the MeasuringBoard's launch in autumn 2002, the technology has transformed Planit from a Toronto-focused company to one with North American, and even global ambitions. The technology enables Planit to have licensed trained users anywhere in the world, while still maintaining control over all client contracts and the final deliverable. Planit has recently licensed users in Vancouver, Montreal and Calgary.

And other markets beckon. In February 2002, Planit demonstrated an early prototype of the

MeasuringBoard to representatives of ANVAR, NRC-IRAP's equivalent organization in France. Laurie says the product was enthusiastically received, especially since in France legislation requires that all buildings be measured prior to re-sale.

Along with an expanding market, Planit has attracted investor financing-in part through an NRC-IRAP initiated contact with the Canadian Association of Management Consultants.

As a result of this investment and market expansion, Planit's staff has grown from eight to 18, including the addition of experienced management strength to give the company a firm footing for future growth.

Now Laurie is once again thinking outside the box about how to integrate a gyroscope and Global Positioning System (GPS) technology into a next generation MeasuringBoard. And, he's turning to NRC-IRAP to help identify all the dimensions of this next-generation technology.

"We're getting into an area which is beyond me being able to sit down and tinker with it," says Laurie. "We need to hire people with specialized skills, so we need IRAP R&D financing and also to tap into IRAP's reach to find the people and technologies we need."

www.planitmeasuring.com

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Mike Laurie
President
The Planit Measuring Company

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